

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 FRANKFURT 007642

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: Christian Democrats Likely to Win Absolute Majority in Upcoming Saarland Elections

REF: a) Berlin 2736, b) 2003 Frankfurt 3946, c) Frankfurt

4964 d) Frankfurt 5178 e) Frankfurt 5692 f) Frankfurt 5927

Sensitive but unclassified - not for internet distribution

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (SBU) Bolstered by the popularity of Minister-President Peter Mueller, the Saarland CDU (Christian Democrats) likely will retain its majority in September 5 state elections and improve on the party's 1999 result, when they won 45 percent of the vote. Opposition Social Democrats (SPD) could see their support decline to around 30 percent (from 44% in 1999). Fueled by a successful campaign against genetically modified organisms (GMOs), Saarland's Greens should return to Parliament after a poor 1999 showing, while the Free Democrats (FDP) have a smaller chance of crossing the five-percent threshold. Observers warn of a possibility, albeit remote, that disenchantment with economic reform could propel the far-right National Democrats (NPD) into Parliament. END SUMMARY.

Opinion Polls Indicate Decisive Victory for CDU

[12.](#) (U) Recent polls indicate a commanding lead for Minister-President Peter Mueller and the CDU. A September 26 poll by Saarlaendischer Rundfunk and Infratest Dimap predicts a 51% return for the CDU (up from 48% in a May 2004 poll), 30% for the SPD (down 3%), 7% for the Greens (up 2%), 5% for the FDP (down 2%), and 7% for other small parties (up 2%). Minister-President Mueller polls 62%, far outstripping SPD challenger Heiko Maas (27%).

[13.](#) (SBU) CDU General Secretary Stephan Toscani told a Consulate representative the CDU's clear lead is due to a focus on its candidate (Mueller) as well as an appeal to the electorate's growing pride in Saarland and its accomplishments (NOTE: Mueller's focus on flexible high-tech ventures utilizing Saarland's small size and low unemployment within the state has been a central feature of the CDU platform. END NOTE). He added that former Minister-President and SPD left-wing activist Oskar Lafontaine's criticism of the Agenda 2010 reforms has complicated the Saarland SPD's campaign because of the increasingly unpopular Lafontaine's association with the party (NOTE: Polls indicate that a majority of Saarland voters perceive Lafontaine's criticism as an attempt to regain the national spotlight rather than genuine opposition to Schroeder reforms. END NOTE). Toscani also noted an alarming growth of anti-Americanism during the campaign, citing as an example a CDU poster with an English-language slogan ("Best of Politik") that was withdrawn after widespread criticism of the advertisement as "too American."

[14.](#) (SBU) The election for Saarbruecken mayor (regarded as the second-most powerful post in the state) could be a potential bright spot for the SPD. Popular SPD challenger Charlotte Britz is the favorite to unseat interim Green incumbent Kajo Breuer (who assumed the seat after the resignation of Social Democrat Hajo Hoffman due to allegations of fraud). An SPD victory in Saarbruecken could preserve SPD chairman Heiko Maas's standing within the party despite a defeat at the state level.

Smaller Parties See Greens Surge, NPD Threaten

[15.](#) (SBU) Saarland's Greens are the clear favorite among smaller parties to enter the Saarland Landtag, currently the only two-party (CDU/SPD) state parliament in Germany. Green party manager Marcus Tressel credits much of the increase in popularity to the party's vigorous campaign against genetically modified organisms and notes the Greens netted 15,000 signatures for a "GMO-Free Saarland" during their campaign. Tressel does not expect an SPD-Green coalition (his preferred option) and calls a coalition with the CDU an option of last resort (assuming the CDU cannot form its own majority).

16. (SBU) The FDP has a smaller chance of re-entering Parliament, plagued by low visibility and the migration of some of its voters to the CDU. A strong FDP showing could complicate CDU efforts to keep its absolute majority, as the CDU would need to get 50 percent of the popular vote (versus around 47 percent in a legislature including only the CDU, SPD, and Greens).

17. (SBU) Some observers speculate that dissatisfaction with Hartz IV reforms could herald the entry of the far-right National Democrats into parliament. NPD national chairman Udo Voigt has mounted a symbolic bid for mayor of Saarbruecken accompanied by a blitz of advertisements. Christian Democrat youth chairman Alexander Funk pointed to significant numbers of anti-Hartz IV NPD protesters at recent CDU rallies as well as surprising returns in some cities in recent Saarland local elections as signs of NPD support. While Green manager Tressel also expressed apprehension at the NPD surge in popularity, he sees its entry into Parliament as unlikely. He noted that most of the party's core support structure remains in east Germany and predicts the few votes the NPD receives would be protests against Hartz IV and other unpopular recent reforms. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the left-wing Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS) remains a long shot to enter parliament despite months of vigorous campaigning.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Current controversy over Hartz IV has erased any bounce the Saarland SPD might have enjoyed after an unexpectedly strong showing in this summer's local and European elections. Oskar Lafontaine's vocal criticism of Schroeder and Agenda 2010 reforms has also hurt the party, scaring away voters repelled by Lafontaine's perceived obsession with the spotlight. While SPD candidate Heiko Maas is a savvy politician and party manager, he is unable to compete with Mueller's broad personal appeal. The SPD's best chance for good news on September 5 remains Saarbruecken mayoral candidate Charlotte Britz.

19. (SBU) A vigorous campaign by Saarland's Greens highlighting weaknesses in the CDU's environmental and education policy should yield them seats in Parliament. Mueller's co-opting of Free Democrat core voters through an FDP-style economic policy makes it somewhat unlikely the FDP will re-enter Parliament. Opposition to economic reform may yield increased support for the NPD (they polled 1% of the vote in 1999). Lacking an extensive support structure within the state, however, Saarland pundits predict the party will be unlikely to cross the five-percent mark and enter the legislature. END COMMENT.

PASI